

Weisberg says death deepens King mystery

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When James Earl Ray died Thursday, the chance of proving his innocence in the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were seriously harmed, according to local author Harold Weisberg.

"Ray didn't kill King and they know it," he said. "I think it's a tragedy they didn't let him get a liyer so our system of justice could work." The legal system "is not working and that's a danger to the country. It's a grave danger."

Mr. Weisberg, 85, published "Frame Up: The Martin Luther King-James Earl Ray Case" in 1971. In 1992, he published "Who Killed Martin Luther King?" He is also the author of several books on the John F. Kennedy assassination.

He worked for Ray's defense team in 1974 and has long maintained Ray's innocence. During a two-week evidentiary hearing, the defense team proved the alleged assassin could not have fired the shot that killed Dr. King in 1968, he said.

Ray never admitted to the crime. He pleaded guilty in March 1969, avoiding conviction and the possibility of a death sentence. But he later said that he made the plea under duress. "He did not confess. He

refused to confess," said Mr. Weisberg.

The prosecution could not place Ray in Memphis, Tenn., at the time of the murder, or match the bullet to his rifle, according to Mr. Weisberg. But the judge ruled Ray was not entitled to a trial because of the plea. He did not consider guilt or innocence, Mr. Weisberg said.

The King family, including Coretta Scott King, Dr. King's wife, requested a trial and have said they believe Ray is innocent. Last year, a Memphis judge ruled that the fatal bullet didn't match Ray's alleged weapon. But Ray was never allowed a trial.

Instead, he languished in prison. He developed cirrhosis of the liver and was hospitalized repeatedly. "This is a man who has been asking for a trial for 30 years," said Mr. Weisberg.

If the government had granted Ray a trial, "it would have shut him up for ever," he said. But "they don't have a case against him. That's the only reason he didn't get a trial."